INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE
Broad Street Presbyterian Church
June 28, 1981

There is always the danger in a travelogue of expecting the hearers to have the zeal and interest of the traveler. We are sensitive to that. This is no travelogue. You will have the opportunity to see our slides and hear about our trip in the fall. This morning is a time to share impressions.

I have always considered myself a seasonal traveler, able to play the game of "Have you been to..." with the best of them. This trip was different. In various ways, direct and indirect, various people asked us, "Why are you here?"

"What is a group of American young people doing in Belfast, the strife-torn slum of Europe?" "Of what concern is our problem to you?" "What is a group of rich Americans doing at Iona discussing world peace when your country is doing everything it can to increase the inevitable nuclear holocaust?"

Our answer of "peace" somehow sounded hollow. We anticipated that. Peace is a word like Mom and apple-pie. Why, who isn't for peace? The question becomes more difficult as you try to understand what exactly is "peace."

In our discussions and study before we left we grew from an idea of peace as quiet and solitude, gazing up at the stars, to a place which encompassed work, play, conflict, justice, and wholeness. We identified at least three facets of peace which are separate but interrelated. Internal, personal peace or well-being; peace with one another in harmony; and peace between groups of people.

On our trip each of these areas were challenged and challenged again. Looking at world peace we struggled with the world's perception of our government's approach. Trying to understand how different people in the same country could be so prejudiced we were confronted with our own subtle prejudices at home. In trying to learn to love our enemies we sometimes found it hard to love our friends - or ourselves.

We have been challenged and grown as instruments of peace. Three of these instruments would like to share some of their experiences with you.

Ashley J. Beavers

First, all the students (people) who went on the Ireland-Scotland trip want to thank the members of Broad Street Presbyterian Church. You made the trip possible with your financial support and encouragement. We could not have made the dream reality without you.

The trip we took was one of the most unforgettable experiences I ever hope to have. The experiences 17 of us had over the past three weeks taught us more than we ever knew about violence in the world today. It taught us to take a look at our country through the eyes of others. And we learned that peace is a very complex matter.

We left Tuesday, June 9, flew from Cleveland to Boston and then on to Shannon, Ireland. We ate a full dinner on both flights so we were starting off on the right foot.

We arrived at 6:00 a.m., Ireland time (1:00 a.m. our time). The cool Irish morning felt very good to 21 weary travelers. A double-decker bus and two trains later we were in Dublin at 1:30 p.m. We spent the afternoon in Dublin exploring Trinity University and seeing the famous Book of Kells, a beautifully illustrated copy of the Four Gospels done by Irish Monks in the 7th or 8th century. We learned later that the Book of Kells may have been done at Iona. We caught another train at 6:30 for a two hour ride to Belfast where we were met by Dr. Donald Fraser and Doug Baker, an American Presbyterian missionary assigned to Corrymeela. It was a relief to see a familiar face. We boarded the Corrymeela bus and arrived in Ballycastle at 10:30 p.m. and were welcomed by a sunset on the Irish Sea that I will not soon forget. After some hot food we fell into our "wee" bunk beds.

We were in a different country for sure; the food, for instance, was very plain, we had potatoes everyday - the meat had no real taste and worst of all they actually like brussel sprouts over there. Hot water is very scarce, the tank held only enough water for about five or six hot showers everyday. This became a problem. Some people arose at the first hint of light to be one of the lucky persons to have a hot shower.

We met with a group of teenagers from Belfast and Londonderry who regarded us as very privileged - and we learned how Americans look to others.

We experienced our first hint of hostility toward our country at Iona - where Irish monks built a monastary in 563 A.D. Attending with us were an assortment of British pacificists. The leaders of the group were totally opposed to nuclear weapons. We learned that not everyone appreciates our country's strength. The British people at the conference felt threatened only because the U.S. has nuclear weapons stationed there. The experience taught us that religion can have both good and bad effects on peacemaking.

Religion has added to the dimensions between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. But we saw Christians in a place like Corrymeela trying to bring them together. We were part of an international community trying, in some way, to contribute to peace in the world. In Iona we attempted to bring up many questions: "What part does Christianity play in the Arms race?" "Is it moral to kill - even for a good cause - like freedom?" "Is the best way to guarantee peace to be so strong that no other nation would attack us?" We argued with the leaders and with ourselves.

I think everyone was affected by the trip in some way. We know now that making peace is not simple. But we also know that there are many people - from many lands - who are willing to work for it. Our hope is that this experience will make us more sensitive - more caring.

John R. Buchanan

On our trip to Ireland and Scotland, we also discovered that peace is necessary not only between nations but within a nation. Going through Belfast and staying at Corrymeela put us right into the heart of the Protestant-Catholic problem. Corrymeela, being a peace center, grew to help resolve this deep-rooted conflict within teenagers and individuals interested in peace.

In fact a group of Belfast Protestant and Catholic teenagers were to come in to Corrymeela the first weekend we were there. Immediately they all got along even though most admitted to some degree of deep-rooted prejudice. We, the Americans, and the two groups broke into smaller mixed sections and discussed the problem in a more detailed fashion. Possible solutions to the problem were formed, and the teenagers all agreed that more sessions like that would help the trouble.

A similar situation took place when we visited two high schools in Ballycastle across the street from one another - one Catholic; the other being Protestant. The Protestant school flew the British flag while the school 100 yards across the street flew the Irish flag. Both groups seemed so much alike yet most admitted to some prejudice also. That night some kids from both schools came up to Corrymeela to see us. Again the meeting of the two groups on neutral ground was very successful.

We also saw a brief editorial on Corrymeela which reviewed the problem. There were two gangs (one Protestant, the other Catholic) who had met several times in a fighting situation. There existed a "no-man's land" or a street which consisted of bricked-up homes that separated the two areas. A reporter talked with the two groups and discovered that neither gang knew the other gang members personally, yet the hatred between them was very strong. They reluctantly agreed to come together on neutral ground (Corrymeela) and spend the weekend away. All participants got along and no fights arose. One boy even commented in conclusion that "this won't change the problem overnight, but it's a start." They all were amazed at how well they got along.

The sadness of the violence, because of the trouble, could be easily seen when we went through Belfast. There were miles of these "no man land" streets of deserted homes. About a foot of barbed wire surrounded police stations and key bars where there had been trouble before. Many ruins of bombed or burned buildings scattered this unpleasant scene also. These unfortunate situations certainly do not make the scene of a peaceful environment. The violence is a result of the religion war so long ago; therefore, most people today are not sure exactly what they're fighting about. This makes peace between the two groups harder, for there are no definite boundaries between them including physical appearance. Talking with and living in the middle of this problem made me thankful to be born in America and to have the simple luxury of peace within a nation. We still have some work to do on the black-white problem, but at least we have made a start. Citizens of Columbus, as well as Ireland, should understand that peace must begin in and between individuals to finally achieve peace within a nation.

Mindy Meade

While Iona was the concrete evidence of our history focusing on international peace and Corrymeela was dealing more with national conflicts in Northern Ireland, both places were settings for us to define our own personal peace. We were told that before we could attain any form of peace with anyone or anything else that we must first be at peace with ourselves. What was this peace we were after? We seemed to find it just by living and experiencing what was around us. There was time for thought, reflection, and growth.

We were "middle men," the neutrality, when we spent a weekend with the Protestants and Catholics of Belfast. It was a time when we could open up to hear our own views and solutions to Ireland's deeply rooted problems. All the answers seemed simple to us but we weren't a part of their culture or traditions. We grew to appreciate our own lives in the United States. This made us want to help them more - we wanted them to have a better life.

The constant interaction with people different from ourselves was one more way we came closer to reaching peace. Discos with handicapped children, panel discussions on the polarization of Northern Ireland with the Irish, discussions about American morality with high school students from Ballycastle, finding loving welcome from families in Moffat, and hearing individuals' views on international disarmament at Iona are just a few things that built a mirror in front of us so we could see what we were. Special relationships were built in just a few days. It was easy to become attached to people we had just met. Departing was always difficult; tears were shed and hands waved for nearly miles. Chances were slim that we would meet with most of these people ever again yet they were still very special in our hearts. Addresses were constantly being exchanged. Letters will probably go back and forth for awhile but the faces will be remembered always.

Another important experience for all of us was the interaction within our own group. You don't really know someone until you've lived with them. I feel it's safe to say that a special love grew between us. We had become a family bonded by faith in ourselves, each other, and God. When we arrived at the American Housing Complex in Dunoon, a small girl asked one of us incredulously, "How many people do you have in your family?" She thought we were from one family. I guess you could say she was right. There was a non-stop sharing and growing between us. It wasn't unusual to see three or four of us, even more, walking down the streets arm in arm. There was so much love - the way it should be.

We took part in all aspects of this trip, the people, the worship in the historic Abbey of Iona and the symbolic croi of Corrymeela, the chores, the activities, and in doing so, peace within ourselves wasn't as hard to reach.

It seemed all too soon to leave and to come home. It wasn't that we didn't want to come home...we missed all the comforts of home like napkins, ice, fruits and vegetables, but especially our loved ones. We didn't want to leave what we had found - we wanted our families to be there sharing it with us. Already I've heard people making plans to go back to Ireland and Scotland. When I was packing I found that I had saved every last tidbit of where we had been. I had saved Irish pounds, seashells, rocks, flowers from Scottish fields that had long since wilted, addresses of people that I had known only briefly, souvenirs, and an abundance of film just waiting to get developed. I wanted to bring it all back with me. I didn't want to lose anything I had gained - any loss would be too much. I know the memories will forever be alive and a part of each of us will remain at these special places.

At Corrymeela there is an important saying which states, "Corrymeela begins when you leave." This is what people like ourselves use as a goal once we have left Corrymeela. This is what we must take and live by. Now we have established some type of peace within ourselves and this will be the foundation to our being instruments of peace outside these places we visited. From the song we practiced before our trip I take this quote, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." Let this be our beginning.

Tammy Diehl

There is a sense in which the story of civilizations is the story of war making. No other enterprise has commanded human resources, human imagination, human creativity, human life, in proportions resembling war making. Barbara Tuchman's brilliantly researched book about the 14th cnntury, A Distant Mirror, is a numbing account of uninterrupted, relentless violence over an entire century. One of the by-products of reading her book, I discovered, was the unhappy conclusion that what human beings have done best, across the centuries, is kill other human beings.

But inside the human story, another drama is unfolding. If it were not for this other talk, I for one would see little reason for hope about the human prospect. The other story, of course, is about God and his people. A story told in the pages of the Bible and sometimes on the history of a nation, but most pointedly by a man, a man who had the audacity to suggest that the best way to deal with an enemy is to love him.

The experience 17 Broad Street young people and four adults shared over the past three weeks exposed us to both of those stories in ways none of us is likely soon to forget. You have heard a bit about it. My guess is that you will hear much, much more. In fact, the pictures aren't developed yet.

We saw, of course, the continuing progression of violence. We saw it graphically in the burnt out ghettoes of Belfast, the armored vehicles and young British soldiers, the ever-present graffiti and the sense that Northern Ireland is polarized more than ever. At Iona, we confronted the way the everyday violence of our country is perceived by others. We confronted, the blunt realities of browing arms trade and the fact that, along with the Soviet Union we seem determined in the name the balance of payments - or balance of power - or balance of terror - to turn the world into an armed camp.

It was not easy for us - but we found ourselves exposed to the blunt facts of the nuclear arms race; the fact that recently major powers have begun to talk about "winnable" nuclear wars and the even blunter fact that the majority of people now seem to believe that nuclear war is inevitable.

Even the place we were visiting reminded us of the darker side of human history. The gentle, serene monastary was repeatedly devastated by Viking raids and was abandoned for awhile as a result.

The urgency of peacemaking is quite simple really. It is based on the simple fact that nuclear weapons have made peace, not a luxury - but the pre-condition for continued life. The urgency is punctuated by the simple fact of continuing violence - in this nation, in the Near East, South America, and South Africa.

Methodist Bishop James Armstrong, addressing the Presbyterian General Assembly in Houston last month on the subject of peace put it plainly:

> "A mood of violence has seized the soul of humankind again,
> a deadly smog of violence that is moving across the landscape."

The complexity of the goal haunted us as we thought about it. Peace is not simply the absence of war. In fact peace is related to many other difficult issues - chief among them economic justice. The Old Testament prophets knew that, of course, "I hate, I despise your solemn assemblies," Amos thundered, "Let justice roll down like waters." And Micah, prophet of peace: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice?"

The "troubles" in Northern Ireland are not about to be resolved, or even to abate so long as 20 or 30% of the young people in Catholic neighborhoods are unemployed. Those numbers are modest by American ghetto standards. The point is that rampant unemployment, and the despair and meaninglessness which accompany it, are the formula for trouble.

We met three characters at Corrymeela who illustrate: vital, energetic young men, unemployed, with no prospects for employment, who pay a pound a day for the privilege of working at Corrymeela. They were the exception, of course. But the prospects for them - for meaningful work, simply don't exist.

Pope John 23 said: "If you want peace, work for justice." He was right, I believe. The two cannot be separated. Peace without justice is not peace at all. Part of the problem with the world, I submit, is that Christian churches and Christian people have not yet learned that basic lesson.

For too long - in too many lands - the Christian church has been identified with wealth and privilege only. The tragic result is that Marxism seems to have the franchise on justice. The irony and the tragedy is very great indeed. The word "justice" has no identifiable content within a Marxism context. No matter. Our own delinquency simply cedes the issue - in country after country.

Our experience stimulated a new awareness that Christians are, by their very name, peacemakers. Our job in the world is to be agents of reconciliation: in our personal relationships - in our places of business, in our politics, and economics, in our world view. There is no party prescription - but the platform is the same for all who would be numbered among the people of Jesus Christ - the reconciling of nations - people to one another.

It is not easy. In fact, you have to look carefully at the human story to see any evidence that the venture has a chance. But it is there - like a small bird singing; like a candle in the dark - like a solitary Galilean daring to suggest that enemies are to be loved, that peacemakers are blessed.

Peace, we learned, peace in Northern Ireland, peace in the world, peace in our own culture - or peace in our own hearts, for that matter, isn't going to happen instantaneously. Rather it will come slowly, gradually, gently. Against the terrible backdrop of violence in Northern Ireland it is coming - because the story of God and his people is being told there too. We heard it and saw it and for awhile participated in it.

We will live out the impact of this experience for some time. You will forgive us, I trust, if we talk too much about it. I echo the gratitude of the others who spoke. It was an extraordinary experience. I would do it again - with those young people - perhaps not tomorrow - but I'd go with them again next week.

That's the hope, you see. They are part of that other story. In their way, they are disciples of Jesus Christ. And the hope - the most hopeful thing about the human prospect I know is that they care. They care about peace enough to be here this morning. They care enough about the Gospel to affirm it. They care enough to argue and discuss and laugh and weep together. They are peacemakers. They are part of this congregation. And if I am sure of anything it is that they are blessed in the sight of God himself.

John M. Buchanan